

BISHOP RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT BUSH'S IRAQ ADDRESS

Make no mistake: President Bush's announcement of a "surge" in U.S. troops in Iraq is an escalation of this misguided war with no apparent end. The President would escalate the war by sending approximately 20,000 more troops into harm's way in an attempt to pacify some of Iraq's most violent areas. His plan operates under the assumption that somehow, some way, there is a military path to success. In other words, this is "stay the course" writ large.

The President's plan also ignores the reality that the only solutions left in Iraq are political ones. This is not simply an insurgency that needs to be crushed. Iraq is in a state of a civil war and therefore needs a political solution. Assuming for a moment that the President's plan temporarily succeeds, and that 20,000 more troops are able to pacify Baghdad; what then? There cannot be a lasting peace if there is not an acceptable government for the people to turn to. Nor will there be a lasting peace if the Iraqi people continue to demonstrate greater interest in sectarian supremacy and exacting revenge than achieving national reconciliation.

In recent months, President Bush has received some good advice from several different quarters, which he seems intent on ignoring. This plan ignores the advice of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group that we should be redeploying our troops, putting far more emphasis on training Iraqi forces to protect their own country. As long as we have an indefinite or even growing commitment, recent history demonstrates that the Iraqis will not feel compelled to take control of their own security.

From a President who claims to listen to his generals, he ignores the advice of leading generals such as General John Abizaid, the outgoing commander of Central Command, who recently told a Senate panel, *"We can put in 20,000 more Americans tomorrow and achieve a temporary effect. But...the ability to sustain that commitment is simply not something that we have right now with the size of the Army and the Marine Corps."* Much like General Eric Shinseki, who famously advised prior to the war that a far higher numbers of troops would be needed to occupy Iraq, General Abizaid's reward for his candor was early retirement.

Finally, this escalation ignores the explicit orders our Commander-in-Chief received from his superior officer, the American people, at the polls this past November. The public realized long before most of its leaders that our Iraq policy was not working and needed a new direction. The most recent CNN/Gallup poll now places the President's approval rating on Iraq at a dismal 26 percent. I do not believe the President has any credibility left with the American people on this subject so long as he continues to stay the course.

Instead, his escalation demonstrates that the President will continue to listen to the same cadre of neo-conservative ideologues who were the architects of this fiasco and who have

always believed that victory is just around the corner. Just as they believed it was when the President stood in front of the “Mission Accomplished” banner in May, 2003.

I have grown increasingly disappointed by the President’s refusal to listen to outside voices. Sure, he’ll occasionally invite a bipartisan group of lawmakers to the White House. But the only thing that comes out of those meetings is more of the same.

I do not support the President’s plan to escalate this war. I will support my colleagues in looking for ways we can use the constitutional authority vested in the Congress to control the purse strings in order to limit the President’s ability to escalate this war.

Our troops have fought bravely. More than 3,000 of them have sacrificed their lives, another 22,000 have been wounded, and nearly \$500 billion has been spent to date on military operations and rebuilding Iraq. We have paid a heavy price. We can’t afford to continue to stay the course or escalate the failures of a broken policy.